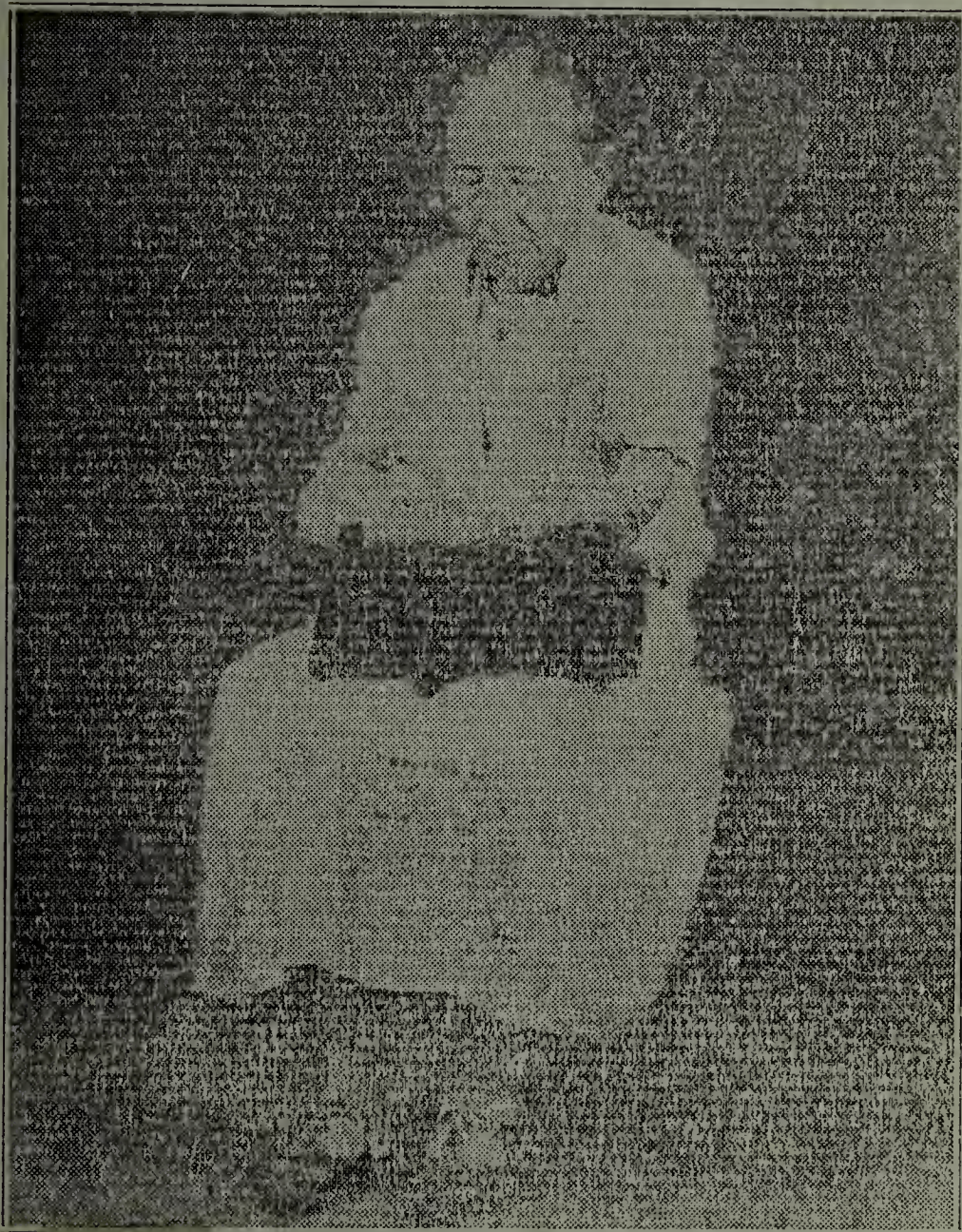


Interesting Life Story of

A Blind Woman

As Told In Her Own Words



MISS BELLE REYNOLDS
At Her Typewriter

Price 25 Cents

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of
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PUBLISHERS INTRODUCTION

In publishing this interesting life story of Miss Belle Reynolds, who has been blind since birth, my purpose is two fold:

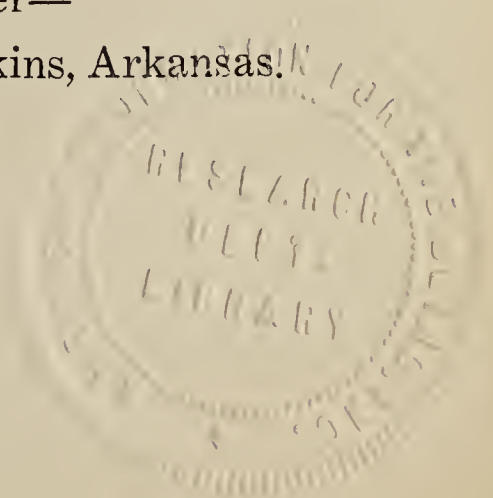
First, I feel that the example of her life and accomplishments, though blind and otherwise handicapped, will be an inspiration to others more fortunate yet who lack confidence in themselves.

Second, that Miss Reynolds may realize some revenue from the sale of these little books that will not only aid her in her efforts to provide for herself but will encourage her and bring a little more sunshine into her life.

The price of the booklet is only 25c and all revenue from the sales, less actual cost of publication, will go to Miss Reynolds. I trust the public will cooperate with the publisher by buying these books. They should prove of much value in any home where children may read them and realize the possibilities of life even under adverse circumstances.

All rights of publication reserved by Miss Reynolds and the publisher—

Ardis Tyson, Atkins, Arkansas.



MY AIM IN LIFE

Everybody needs employment; no matter in what circumstances he or she is placed and I believe there is some kind of work that everybody can do.

A preacher once told me that he thought that blind people ought not to have to work but I reminded him that the Bible says: "He who would not work, might not eat." And, of course, no one could live very long without eating.

It is said that we make more opportunities than we find. Then, surely, everybody is handicapped in some way, so with my two handicapps I am reaching out and yearning for every opportunity possible to spend a useful, helpful, and busy life. It is said, "The busiest life is the happiest life." The greatest happiness is in making others happy," and that, "Usefulness is the rent we are asked to pay for room on earth and some of us are heavily in debt."

No doubt,—people having more advantages, can enter into a greater variety of fields of usefulness. However, it is encouraging to those of us more handicapped, to know, that after we have put forth every effort possible to be successful in any way and then fail, our efforts are not lost. And, it has always been my greatest desire and constant prayer to be included among the most useful, helpful, and busiest people.

(Miss) Belle Reynolds.

Dover, Arkansas

R. F. D. No. 1, Box 35.

MY EXPERIENCES AND ATTAINMENTS

Though often being advised by some of my friends to write the story of my life, I wonder, if it is worthwhile for me to do this? But, as one of my most helpful mottoes is, "We never know what we can do till we try," I shall therefore submit the following and hope it will be of interest and meet with approval.

MY HOME TRAINING

On July 17th. 1879, I was born on a farm in Pope county, Arkansas but only about eight miles from Lamar, Johnson county and I was reared in these and in other counties.

But, not like other children blessed with so many opportunities and advantages, I was born of poor parentage; was totally blind from infancy; and my additional handicap is only one hand. My left arm extends only about two inches below the elbow and at the end of this arm are four tiny fingers less than one half inch long.

Of course I know my inconveniences wrought a greater burden and more worry upon my parents, especially my mother, than did other children yet, fortunately for me, I have always had an independent disposition and have put forth every effort possible to do all I can for myself and to help others, also.

When I was about two years old and again, when I was about eight years old, I fell down and broke my left arm but each time my father bound some thin strips of boards around it until it got O. K.

Once when I was about nine years of age, my mother told one of my younger brothers to watch me and not let me fall into either of the two springs in our yard. Near one of these stood an apple tree around which I began to wander. While trying with my foot to find an apple I thought had fallen on the ground I unexpectedly plunged into the water from the highest part of the embankment as my brother failed to warn me of my approaching danger. Being like some other boys, he was anxious to see me get wet.

I had to play with the boys more because my sisters were older than I and thus I was given plenty of exercise while trying to do the things that they did. Among the things we did were making mud pies and cakes and driving nails with a hammer. The loss of one hand would have deprived me of this occupation had I not succeeded in holding the nails between my toes while driving them through the floor, etc.

I was reared by an open fire-place and it is a wonder I hadn't been burned to death as I often enjoyed the sound of igniting pieces of paper whenever I could get a chance to do so. One day my sense of smell warned my clothes were burning and, fearing my mother might whip me if I went to her I ran out into the yard where a nice carpet of snow put out the fire after I had fallen down and rolled over and over several times to make sure that I was free from all danger. I finally learned from experience not to play with fire any more.

Sometimes my mother would let me dry the dishes and churn which I greatly enjoyed. After much begging and sometimes crying, she and my father would allow me the pleasure of picking some cotton besides shelling corn and doing what other things I could of our farm work such as trying to pull fodder. My uncle, who enjoyed scaring folk, was with us then. He slipped behind me, pinched my foot and oh, how I screamed! For I thought a snake had bitten me.

It was while we were moving and having to cross the Arkansas river that I had my first ride on a ferry-boat and when I heard the noise of the engine I began to cry and when asked what was the matter I said I thought the team was frightened and was running off the boat into the water.

Another fright I had was when I took a piece of bread to the hen house to feed the chickens and they had gone to roost. I did not know it was almost dark and I decided to remove the wooden pin that fastened the door. As I attempted to step inside to crumble down my bread for the chickens, the door pushed me backwards and fell on me and all of my arduous efforts were in vain trying to release myself from under its weight. At last, my

screams and the cackling of the chickens, flying over me brought someone from the house to my rescue. And, while penned to the ground, I thought I might be harmed by snakes or by cattle or hogs as I heard tramping all around me outside. How thankful I was to get back into the house again.

I once fell off our high porch, knocking myself senseless. The next thing I knew I was in my mother's lap and she was washing my face. I found that I had hurt my back.

Some of our neighbors tried to persuade my mother not to whip me because I was blind but she told them she could not allow me to have my own way in everything for I needed to be corrected like the other children and it was her duty to do so. Like other children, when I knew a whipping was in store for me, I would run from her and try to hide. My most convenient hiding place was under the bed but sooner than I expected the licks of her switch reminded me that I was found.

Of course I appreciate her corrections now and for more than the others do because I have been told since her death that whenever she whipped me she was seen crying as she went away from me. And this is heart-rendering to me now. But "When God shall bring every work into judgement with every secret thing whether it be good or bad," she will know how grateful to her I am now. If all children could know how much it grieves our parents to correct us, surely, we would not be so bad.

MY SCHOOL LIFE

Prior to my entrance into the Arkansas State School for the Blind in which I was admitted as a pupil at the age of ten, I had learned to count to one hundred, the multiplication table and to spell several familiar words and to sing a great many songs. I was always very fond of music, and wore out quite a number of harps and some accordians.

My mother could not be persuaded to let me go to the Blind school until one of my sisters, who had a position there, came for me. When I boarded the train enroute to

Little Rock it was the last time I heard my mother's voice and she was crying. It was our first separation and over which she grieved so much that she died on April 15, after I left home on March 1. But she would not consent to send for me after I had gotten a start in school because she was afraid if I came home I might get dissatisfied and not wish to return. She wanted me to get an education.

When the sad news of her death reached my aunt she asked the superintendent if she could tell me but he would not let her do so until the school closed about the last of May. This caused my first vacation to be spent in great despondency and my grand-mother, my father's mother, often found me crying and she cheered and comforted me so much that I finally became reconciled by the time I returned to the Blind School in October.

The first time I rode on a train was when I went from Lamar to Little Rock and after reaching there I had my first street-car ride (then drawn by horses) before arriving at the Blind school.

Of course, during the first term of school, I still had to be corrected but I was punished there without being whipped. I remember once I had to lie in bed all day for scaring one of the other little girls.

But one time the charge of the little girls decided to whip four of us who were quarreling and calling us to her room made us lie down on the floor in a row. She gave the first girl one lick; the second two; the third three and I happened to be the fourth girl so I got the four licks.

When she was out of her room we had great fun sliding astride down the banisters of the back porch and when told that some were sliding down on their knees I tried to do this too, but as I had only one hand with which to hold, I fell off on the porch and hurt my back again.

In the kindergarten, we were taught to play games while singing; to roll up long strips of paper as tightly as possible; to fold square sheets of paper into fans, soldier's caps, boats, birds, pigs, etc. and other things I could not do.

But another thing I enjoyed so much was when our teacher brought to each one of us a board on which lay a big ball of clay and we were told to make everything we could out of it.

As I was rather small to my age, I was allowed to remain in the kindergarten longer than those who outgrew me.

In the literary department of only ten grades then, I at first learned to read the line letter books (raised letters like those seen on bottles etc.) After this I learned to read and write the New York Point. (A dot system.)

I studied expression for several terms for public reading and took a course in typewriting. First using the Oliver then the Corona and now I use the baby Underwood on which I am typing my story. I almost completed the literary course there.

A thorough training in the junior choir was my beginning in music but I was not satisfied with this alone. I wished to learn to play at least one of the many instruments taught to those having two hands. So each day, I would beg my teacher to teach me to play something and, when refused, I would be very much discouraged until finally he agreed to let me take lessons on the cornet and it became one of my specialties in music.

Next, in the conservatory, I was given special lessons in voice training for several terms. I also learned to play the piano and to do this I play the bass notes with the fingers on my left arm while playing the other three parts with my right hand and thus I play the accompaniments to my vocal solos; several hymns, and some instrumental pieces, two of which, are my own compositions.

And too, we were given thorough training in theory and composition and special instructions as how to teach sighted folk to read the ink-print music. But, of course, our music is written in a dot system which we read with our fingers and memorize and then play it on whatever instrument for which it is written.

I graduated in music and received my diploma in June of 1906. However, during my last term of school, the

death of one of my sisters broke another golden link of the chain of my loved ones.

I had a siege of two abscesses, one in each ear at the same time, and had not the doctor and nurse given such constant care and good attention needed I would have lost my hearing.

In the gymnasium of our school, I was taught several fancy steps for exercise but I was excused from other performances and drills requiring two hands to do these things.

Again, the loss of my left hand prevented me from learning to do much in the industrial department for girls in which were taught sewing by hand and on the machine, tatting, crocheting, weaving rugs etc. However, I learned to thread up the machine and to sew straight seams and hem a little bit. I hemmed some towels and made a few pillow cases. I learned to thread a sewing needle with my tongue, teeth and lips.

Before we were supplied with typewriters in school, I failed to mention that we were taught pencil writing by using boards having ridges and grooves like a rub-board and after creasing the paper over the board and down in the groove we started each letter at the top, middle, or bottom of the groove and extend it upon the ridge or down on the ridge as dictated. This writing was called square-hand or back-hand writing. However, here again, I was excused from the writing class by two teachers who told me I was wasting time trying to do this but I could not be satisfied until after I had gone to my third teacher who told me she was willing to help me just as long as I wanted to try. So, I learned to write some though not as well as others there.

I have given several recitals in remote parts of this state and some in Oklahoma and Kansas to try to gain a livelihood. I have also, taught children music, expression, and primary literary work in private homes just for my board, laundry, etc. I have been almost wholly dependent upon my own resources for a number of years. My father married again in about ten years after my mother's death. Due to unpleasant scenes for some time and be-

cause he and my step-mother became so feeble before her death, I knew I would be a burden to them if I stayed at home. In order to make the arrangements as stated above, I have visited and I still visit with relatives and friends.

Once while visiting friends who were digging a well, I, for curiosity's sake, ventured down a steep ladder into the well about thirteen feet deep then. I requested that my cornet be brought to me. At first I thought of playing "How Firm A Foundation," but quickly decided to play "Higher Ground," before ascending the ladder.

Whenever convenient and agreeable, I do appreciate every opportunity to gain all information possible about objects with which I never or hardly ever come in contact. I have had the pleasure of touching some of these as follows: aeroplane, tractor, grist-mill, saw-mill and a planer.

In one day's journey I at first rode on a mail-car, second in a wagon, and third on a mule. During that day I churned at the three stopping places which I believe is a record in that line.

I once rode in a skiff across the Arkansas river. I had to climb a very steep bank before I came to the road where a wagon awaited my ride to James Town.

AFTER GRADUATION

At times while in school and since leaving there I have tried to write poetry but with little success. My first rhyme is entitled "Spring". Others are: "Commerce," "Ex President Roosevelt's Visit to Little Rock," "My Christmas Round," "The Helping hand." "The New Year," etc.

I have had more financial success giving recitals. My programs consist of cornet, vocal solos, a piano solo, an original composition and readings, both humorous and pathetic. However of late years my recital work is a thing of the past.

I have tried to sell the Regal products, and pencils. I am trying to sell the double-bubble gum. By means of a medium-laid seine twine and with my fingers I taught

myself to crochet mats and hand-bags. Also, to crochet baskets, trays, etc. of all shapes and sizes and then get someone to starch them and dry them on their respective solid shapes. Then to shellac them with a paint brush and dry them again. After which, to put little bows or rozettes of bright colored ribbons on them before I tried to sell them. But of course my work does not sell well now.

I have taught several blind people over school age to read the Braille, another dot system, which is our uniform type now and which I had to learn both to read and to write.

Before Oklahoma was admitted to the Union I assisted in programs given for the benefit of the blind and deaf there and I taught the blind one term in that school just for my board and other necessities.

I have had many narrow escapes. Some of which are as follows:

The most serious one I think was by almost being shot by a drunk man. And next, being in a buggy when it turned over and my father fell out of it. I had my left arm around an iron piece fastened to the seat. So I stayed there.

I was in two runaways. The first one with my father and one of my sisters. But in the other one I was by myself in a buggy drawn by two horses which got frightened at a dog barking and started, leaving the driver to run and climb in. While wondering if ever he would come to my rescue, I yelled to him: "Catch them, if you can." Ha, Ha!

I almost got run over by a train and was almost pulled under one. I was in two car accidents; was thrown from a mule; was almost hooked by a cow and I am almost certain that I had a narrow escape of being kidnaped, as follows:

After boarding a train going from Newport to Little Rock the conductor seated me beside a traveling salesman who asked me the following questions: "Are you blind,"? "Are your parents living"? "Are you married"? and "Where are you going"?

I told him I was blind; that only my father was living; that I was not married and that I was going to Lamar if I could make good train connections in Little Rock. If not, I would have to stay at a hotel till the next day.

Then he told me in a mournful voice that his wife had been dead nine years and that if I would live with him he would give me a good home for life. I told him I would rather remain single and continue to try to earn my own living as best I could.

As he ceased talking I thought he had gone. I leaned back against the seat and closed my eyes for I was tired and sleepy. In a short time he laid his hand in my lap and I quickly pushed it away and asked him if he would show me another seat.

He, apologetically, said that he had been asleep and that he would get another seat. So he left me but he sat down by me again just before the train stopped in Little Rock. When I got off, the conductor instead of calling the matron for me, told him to take me where I wanted to go.

Soon we stepped into some building and I said aloud: "Oh, where am I"? He and someone else there told me that I was in a hotel. I hurriedly explained that I wished to get on the train enroute to Lamar if I could make connections. So my deceiving guide said he would show me to the train then.

As we were retracing our steps we met Rev. Bogard for whom I had played the cornet in his church in North Little Rock while I was a pupil in school. He spoke to me for, no doubt, he noticed my frightened face and asked me if he could help me in any way.

Oh, how thankful was I! that I could release myself from my mistrusting guide to clasp the hand of him in whom I could trust and he saw me safely on the train.

If ever Rev. Bogard reads this, he will know how grateful I am to him for his thoughtfulness of me and his accommodation. He perhaps saved me from being kidnaped and taken into a house of white slavery.

Oh, there is so much power in the hand. And would it always could be the helping hand instead of the wicked hand!

BODY WRENCHED IN ACCIDENT

In one of my car accidents I must have gotten my body wrenched. For several months I had severe pains in my back and all around my body and I was under the doctors care almost all the time until finally I was advised to go to St. Mary's hospital where I stayed almost two weeks. An x-ray before leaving there the doctor said showed the ligaments and muscles were the cause of my trouble. At any rate, my hospital bill was sixty one dollars and I had to borrow this amount from the loan fund of the Arkansas State Association for the Blind (of which I am a member) to pay my bill. I regret very much that the lack of opportunities have prevented me from paying back to the Association this amount and some more that I had to borrow for necessities a few years ago. But I hope I can do this sometime soon.

The membership fees of the Association raise the loan fund from which a member can borrow to get a start in business or for necessities and pay it back with only four per cent interest.

It was also agreed that each member try to raise two hundred and fifty dollars or as much as he could to create a Home fund to start a home for adult blind women. I raised this amount and I was the first blind resident of the Home in Little Rock.

But I remained there only one year. I got dissatisfied and felt that it was my duty to leave there and to keep on trying to gain a livelihood and, if in any way possible, to help my father who is eighty-six years old now.

I recall an amusing incident about him and my uncle getting ready to go in a buggy to grand-pa Pless' birthday dinner who was one hundred and one years old that day.

I told them I was ready to go too but I was told that we three could not sit in the seat. So I tried to sit side-wise in the little bed behind it. However, I could not ride this way. Then I braced my back against the seat and placed my feet on a piece outside of the buggy. I was told that I could not ride this way unless I were tied. So I said "Please tie me then for I want to go."

My father stretched a rope in front of me and tied it to each side of the seat and this kind of a ride enabled me to spend one of the most pleasant days of my life.

In reviewing my past life, I wish to relate a few more things of interest. Among them, Miss Helen Keller's visit to the Blind school when I was a pupil there. On leaving she kissed the little girls good-bye. Discovering that I had only one hand, she was so sympathetic that she gave me a beautiful boquet of flowers.

When I was about 13 years of age the Legislature gave me a pretty gold heart and chain. On one side of the heart are three sets; the ruby, pearl and turquois. On the other side are the words: "General Assembly, 1893." We entertained the Legislature with a program and my reading was my first before the public.

I also received a gold medal from the faculty of the school when I graduated. Both of which I prize very highly.

It may be of special interest to state that I sang special songs once for Rev. Reynolds during the week of his broad-casting devotional services in Little Rock. I was in the Industrial Home for Blind Women there at the time. And while in School, I was encouraged by the thought that if ever television is perfected, I might make good by broadcasting over the radio; as it seems to be a novelty for people to see me play the piano with one hand.

I have written to the manager of one of the leading magazines for the blind about this matter and he said he thought I could not have much success in this line of work on account of such small pay even to some sighted folk.

At present my father and I make our home with one of my brothers and family of his wife and three children residing on a small farm near Dover. But my work calls me away from home most of the time.

In closing, I would say that it is my earnest desire and constant prayer to place myself and all I have wherever needed most and to be a blessing, at least in some way, to every one with whom I meet.

(The End.)

While in School we sang a Round in a program for our closing concert, the music of which my teacher used some years later for the following words I sent to them for a Christmas selection.

"My Christmas Round"

Do you hear the bells, the merry sleigh-bells
And old Santa's tuneful lay?
Waking every one with shouts and happy hearts
To welcome Christmas day.

Boys and girls find flash-lights,
Air-guns, marbles, tops, and balls,
Watches, vases, dolls, and dishes,
Stoves, and games that all can play.

Wagons, rocking-chairs and swings;
Books with pictures gay.
Candies, pop-corn;
And luscious fruits and mixed nuts: say!

We have no time now to mention
All the other things:
For we must thank dear old Santa Claus,
Ere he speeds away.

Santa! Santa! Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha!
Heartiest thanks! Wish you could stay.
Good-by: Come back,
Whene'er you may.

"Spring"

The snow has melted from the ground,
The Winter days are passed;
The birds are singing all around,
For Spring is come, at last.

How warm and pleasant is the day!
How refreshing is the air!
The happy children skip and play:
There is gladness everywhere!

Yes, the pleasant Spring is come
And pleasant are the hours;
We love to watch the bees that hum
And gather fragrant flowers.

Yes, gather flowers, both you and I,
For bouquets and to smell;
And see the greengrass growing by,
Which cattle like so well.

The bright and morning sun just came
Whose glorious warm ray glows:
But let us all rejoice the same,
Whatever comes or goes.

"The Helping Hand"

The hand that helplessly hangs down
Can ne'er attain to great renown
But it becomes a useless gift
Devoid of power itself to lift.

The wicked hand can do much wrong:
Its touch is feared, its grasp is strong:
For it is full of cruel deeds,
Though many a cry for mercy pleads.

But every hand that seeks some field.
Of usefulness, much good can yield;
Its gentle touch is felt afar,
Its waves roll onward like a star.

Its power is great to cheer and bless,
It holds vast wreathes of happiness
On every sea, on every land:
Oh, God, bless every helping hand!

R

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WOMAN AS TOLD IN HER OWN WORDS

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